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ABSTRACT

The language situation of immigrants to Australia, or social bilinguals, is distinguished from that of second language learners, or cultural bilinguals. The former lag behind in employment and school achievement. The solution proposed entails learning English, though both children and adults appear to reach a plateau in learning after initial progress. This study suggests mother tongue maintenance as a solution. Evidence from linguistic theory is cited from Fillmore and McCawley. Bilinguals should be given the opportunity to observe norms in both of their languages, and bilingual education is seen as a program that takes the student's two languages in his social environment into account. Four bilingual education models are described (transitional, emphasis on the native language, emphasis on the second language, and balanced), the balanced model being seen as most suitable for Australia. The Multilingual Project described here, a form of bilingual education primarily concerned with concept learning, has developed independent study units in social studies. 600 students in fifteen secondary schools are participating, and materials are provided in English and Arabic, Greek, Italian, Turkish, Serbian and Croatian. The goal of the project is to allow students to opt for aspects of each heritage rather than totally rejecting or accepting either one. (CLK)

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9. BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN ACTION: THE MULTILINGUAL PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

The Australian immigration policy has created a minority upon whom bilingualism has been socially imposed. As all interactions with institutions, including schools, occur in English, any person living in the country must be able to command sufficient English to carry out his daily tasks. With respect to language the immigrant has no choice; he must be able to function to some degree in two languages. For the purposes of this discussion a bilingual will be therefore defined as an individual who can behave appropriately in two language environments, irrespective of his proficiency in either language. It is assumed that his proficiency in L1 (first language) and L2 (second language) will vary according to domains.

Other members of the community, in particular secondary school students, are also exposed to a second language in their foreign language classrooms. This is a culturally imposed bilingualism; language is not used in real situations, for real communication. These days the audio-lingual method does emphasize the communicative aspect of language (which is commendable), but has not solved the problem as the classroom situation imposes its own style (Henzl, 1973). The speech events that occur are method-dependent.

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Although course materials introduce everyday speech events, these are simulated. Neither situations nor style variations are genuine. It is difficult to learn from artificial course materials because they are not sufficiently informative. Sociolinguistic competence is a sophisticated skill and cannot be acquired on the basis of a few dialogues with the visual element largely missing. Consequently, most foreign language learners are frustrated potential bilinguals. Their initial expectations that they will be able to use the foreign language to communicate with its native speaker are quickly dashed.

In Australia the social bilingual (the immigrant), usually outstrips the cultural bilingual (the foreign language student) in a relatively short time. Although immigrant adults and children can usually function in our society quite adequately (within certain limits) they get little credit for it. Their weaknesses on the other hand attract a great deal of attention. It is a generally accepted fact that in terms of employment and school achievement they lag behind the dominant English speaking population. This is ascribed to their poor command of English and therefore learning English is supposed to provide the final solution. So far, despite sincere efforts by educators, adults and children after some satisfactory initial progress seem to reach a limit or plateau. If the learner does not see any further benefit accruing from the additional effort necessary to conform more closely to the norms of his second language he will settle at a proficiency level that allows him to get by. Attempts to upgrade his

language skills will fail. From the point of view of the adult this may be a correct assessment of his situation. His advancement is blocked on so many different fronts in any case. For instance, his qualifications are not recognised or are downgraded and he is ignorant of the selection procedures applied to occupational advancement in the Australian community. He would be justified in considering his lack of proficiency in English as just one of many obstacles making upward job mobility difficult.

In the case of the child and adolescent there seems to be a consensus of opinion shared by educators, parents and students that success in school studies and employment does depend on proficiency in English. Yet, many young Australians also encounter language learning difficulties. They too eventually reach a plateau and cannot rise above it despite continued efforts to help them reach the competence of a mature English native speaker. Not all students experience such a setback.

Its likely occurrence cannot be predicted from length of residence in Australia. The educational background of the family and the language variety used in the home seem to play a far more significant role in the child's development and general progress in school. Many educators are now aware of this, yet, they have made no attempt to reconsider their teaching strategies. They still act as if success in L2 learning depended solely on the right teaching methods and good study habits. This type of approach is based on two misconceptions. Firstly, that

English-speaking monolinguals have no language difficulties. Secondly, that knowing one language interferes with the effective learning of another. If this were the case all foreign language learning should immediately cease in our schools as it could harm the English speaking population. This is of course nonsense. But one cannot help wondering in what way the migrant child is intellectually inferior if his language learning capacity is supposed to be obstructed by the continued use of his MT (mother tongue). On the contrary, I would argue that it is the suppression of the MT that hinders L2 development.

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

One of the cogent arguments in favour of language maintenance is based on the principle that the school takes the child where he stands, builds on and develops what he already knows and certainly does not waste it. The bilingual's knowledge enables him to use the most dramatic form of style variation, that of code switching. He can express the concepts he intends to convey by means of the lexical items and sentence structures of two languages.

Among linguistic theories (Fillmore's 1968) Case Grammar seems to have explanatory power here. The language universals it advocates make it possible to describe the bilingual's capacity to express his intention in different codes as a surface structure variation, based on a unified cognitive network. As Chafe (1970) points out people's semantic resources are not identical, because the inherent features of a given lexical item vary from individual to individual. In this view

a bilingual would not necessarily have greater knowledge of the world compared with the monolingual, but only a different type of choice in expressing it. It would be an interlinguistic rather than an intralinguistic choice.

If McCawley (1972) has captured an essential feature of speech production, then his description of the process could serve as an additional explanation of the bilingual's language use.

> Regarding the question of how people use a grammar in speaking and listening, I wish to emphasize that I do not claim that the whole semantic structure is necessarily ever present as a whole in the speaker's mind at a single time. In producing a complex sentence, one is simultaneously constructing meaning and producing sounds, and the construction of the meaning and phonetic form go on in parallel. It is of course extremely common for a person to pronounce the first few words of a sentence before he is really sure what the entire content of the sentence will be. I would guess that an appropriate model for speech production would involve a system of derivational constraints which one uses much in the same way that a composer composes a fugue: he starts with something that will come out first and jumps back and forth between the various 'levels', constructing bits and pieces of each at a time, and doing so in such a way that (if he is

successful) everything ends up being consistent. This can perfectly involve an 'early' piece of 'sound' corresponding to a 'late' piece of 'meaning'. The order of the elements in semantic structure (if they in fact have a linear order) need not correspond to the order in which a person thinks of them in assembling the meaning; the only psychological correlate to linear order in semantic structure that I can imagine would be the order in which various elements are judged to be 'well-formed' in whatever chain of psychological events would be involved in a person's checking that the things he is saying are semantically coherent, and I have no idea how one could investigate such psychological events. (McCawley 1972 : 95-96)

If we accept McCawley's view that the "whole semantic structure" of sentences is not a necessary condition of fluent speech production, that on the contrary sentences are constructed in "bits and pieces" then interference phenomena which characterise the language of bilinguals is easily understood. Moreover, the view that bilinguals possess a common pool of language is further reinforced (Neufeld 1973).

NORMS

Lexical and semantic transfers, semantic expansions and neologisms are frequently used devices to keep languages abreast of technical, economic and social developments. They are employed by speakers on the basis of a shared understanding and shared norms. The same devices

employed for personal convenience by the individual immigrant because of lack of easy availability of a term is by contrast a practice that violates or distorts the standard norms. The young child and the adolescent growing up in a language environment where transference and code switching are widely practised by adult speakers is in a confusing situation. He may gain the impression that it is not particularly important to observe language norms. Moreover, the adult language available for observation presents him with inconsistent models. (cf. Ervin-Tripp 1973). Under these circumstances it is more difficult to develop language specific rules, and to recognise the necessity that in some styles language norms must be strictly adhered to. In this situation bilinguals must be given the opportunity to observe norms in both of their languages. Bilingual texts offer this opportunity by exemplifying how the same idea is expressed in a standard form in the MT and in English.

RELEVANCE OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

For purposes of this discussion bilingual education is a program that takes the student's two languages in his social environment into account. Bilingual education models developed in the United States, Canada, France, Germany and other countries, can be roughly categorized as follows:

1. Transitional
2. Emphasis on L1
3. Emphasis on L2
4. Balanced

1. Transitional programs recognise the need to learn new concepts in a familiar language. Consequently, the beginner in L2 is given instruction in all or some subjects at school in L1 and taught L2. As L2 is strengthened there is a shift in the medium of instruction to L2, until all instruction is given in L2. L1 may disappear from the curriculum or may be retained as a subject, but ceases to be used as the language of instruction. Most United States and Canadian programs belong to this category.

2. Programs concentrating on L1 emphasize the learner's ethnic identity and encourage this loyalty to his ethnic group vis-à-vis the dominant society. Some Spanish bilingual programs in the United States see this as their ultimate aim and would like to develop instruction in Spanish up to and including tertiary education. The Canadian French advocate the same. Guest worker education in Europe also tends to move in this direction as students are expected to return eventually to their country of origin. Supporters of these programs argue that this is the only way in which educational opportunities for members of ethnic minorities and dominant groups can be equalised.

3. The concerted effort to teach L2 and to teach in L2 is also termed bilingual education in the United States, particularly if the study of L2 features on the time-table. I think those Australian schools that offer MT instruction would be surprised to know that in American terms they are offering bilingual programs.

4. Balanced bilingual education provides instruction in parallel form

throughout the child's schooling or as a compromise measure until the student is mature enough to maintain L1 fully by his own efforts with respect to oral and literary skills.

All four approaches have politico-social implications. But there is a marked difference between the first three and the last. Whereas a transitional or L1 maintenance program places strong emphasis on the students' group membership, i.e. dominant vs. minority, the program aimed at balanced bilingualism not only concentrates on the needs of the learner, in cultural, psychological and linguistic terms, but also aims at bicultural group membership.

Such a combination of loyalties could be a feasible solution to the young immigrant's problem in Australia. (cf. Mackie, 1974).

My own research (Rado, forthcoming) which involved the interviewing of 15 to 18 year old bilingual adolescents, attending secondary school in Victoria in 1973, supports this view and can be summarized in the words of one of them:

> "I was born in Australia. I don't mind being called
> Australian, I am not ashamed of being Italian.
> I'm proud of my heritage -
> You could say I have two -
> an Australian one and an Italian one".

THE MULTILINGUAL PROJECT

The Multilingual Project is a form of bilingual education that is primarily concerned with concept learning. Language maintenance is not

its primary goal but a means to an end. I am convinced that in the final analysis bilingualism is a personal decision. Attitudes towards it fluctuate during a person's lifetime. Even if L1 is rejected during an individual's schooling, as Harvey (1974) points out, interest in it is sometimes renewed later in life. The justification of bilingual education is therefore not based on the desire to legislate for language maintenance, but on the conviction that the bilingual needs both languages, his total pool of language, to learn efficiently.

If the school is to support him in this, learning materials must be developed bilingually if they are to serve him as well as English-speaking monolinguals are served by their English texts. Obviously, not all learning materials can be duplicated in all immigrant languages. It would be costly to produce the parallel language versions and technically impossible to provide the teachers for the implementation of such a scheme. Yet, bilingual education can be provided in selected subject areas on the basis of individual or small group instruction. The Multilingual Project has already developed several independent study units in the social studies area to provide bilingual education for those interested in participating. Approximately 600 students in 15 secondary schools are currently involved in the Project. The Education Department of Victoria is supporting the Project by the secondment of four qualified teachers on half-time appointment for the development of the English version of the study units. It is also meeting the cost of translating these into Arabic, Greek, Italian, Turkish, Serbian and Croatian. The

study units consist of textbooks, self-corrective workbooks and activity kits which include audio-visual materials, games, etc.

Bilingual education in this form can be practised independently of ethnic teachers (if they are not available) and irrespective of the numbers and composition of ethnic groups in schools. Hopefully, the Project will stimulate the implementation of cross-age tutoring and the involvement of interested adults in the community of all ethnic groups including Australians who may wish to learn or upgrade their knowledge of an immigrant language.

Bilingual education in early childhood is not new in Australia. It is operative in Aboriginal education, particularly in the Northern Territory. Perhaps, educators concerned with immigrant children in this age group will now look more closely at this experiment and profit by it. The Multilingual Project caters for an older group, the adolescent. Interest in this group can be justified on the grounds of their special needs. For most of these students, time is running out, in a few years they will leave school. If they are new arrivals and therefore usually beginners in English they cannot afford to wait for their L2 to develop sufficiently to continue subject matter learning. Concept learning must go on without interruption. If they use L1 at home and L2 at school they must be given the opportunity to learn in both to ensure complete comprehension. If they are already literate in L1 and competent in L2 it is educationally wasteful not to maintain and develop literary skills in L1.

CONCLUSION

Bilingual education caters for the immigrant student needs realistically. It recognizes the fact that his adjustment to his bicultural environment is that of accommodation rather than a question of total acceptance or rejection of his mother tongue or English, of his parents' culture or of the Australian way of life. He is selectively opting for some aspects of each heritage. Our role as educators is not to choose for him, but to support him in his bilingual and bicultural status so that he can forge his dual heritage into a balanced whole.

If a residue of tension does remain, within the individual, this may prove more stimulating than harmful. My research shows that balanced bilingual adolescents are remarkably sensitive to other people's needs.

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